

ART. VIII.—*Poisoning by Strychnia.* By JOSEPH WILSON, M. D.,  
Surgeon U. S. Navy.

On the evening of April 27th, 1864, a stranger from the western train stopped at Brown's Hotel, Erie, Pa., and after registering a false name in the office, notified his desire to go to bed. The next that was heard of him was about three hours afterwards, near midnight, when screams of "murder" and "help" issued from his room, in such a way as to arouse the young men occupying the adjoining rooms. They were not long in breaking open the door, and one of them immediately called me with the information that a young man in the hotel was suffering with dreadful spasms.

I found him lying on his back in terrific convulsions. The heels, head, and elbows were firmly pressed into the bed, in paroxysms in which the body seemed entirely supported on these points. The paroxysms were short, and came in rapid succession—perhaps lasting two minutes, with intervals of half a minute or less. They came on with violent clonic convulsions, in which the muscles of the dorsal surface greatly prevailed over those in front. They quickly became more quiet and steady in their action, and gradually relaxed till the body came in general contact with the bed. The tetanic rigidity remained in some degree till the next paroxysm, which was not postponed more than half a minute. A slight touch of the forehead produced a violent convulsion with the suddenness of an electric shock. The accidental touching of his foot produced a like result. Probably the whole surface of his body was thus sensitive; and he was so well aware of it that most of the time in which he was able to speak was occupied in begging not to be touched.

The character of the convulsions, and a drachm vial impressively labelled strychnia, with the well-known initials P. W. (Powers & Weightman) impressed on the top of the cork, left no doubt of the nature of the case. About three-fourths of the contents of the vial had been removed. The remains of a biscuit were on the table near the vial, with white particles adhering to its broken surfaces.

The gentlemen present were intelligent and active assistants and messengers. In the course of a minute one was knocking up the nearest apothecary, and quickly had in his hand this prescription: R.—Zinci sulph. ʒj; Ipecac. pulv. ʒj. M. Another followed to the same place, just in time not to intercept the first, and procured this mixture: R.—Tannin ʒj; Syrup. aurantii, Aquæ, āā ʒj. M. ft. Another was in the kitchen, preparing a strong cup of tea.

The first thing available which came to hand was Tr. opii mxxx, which I had in my pocket. This a little diluted I placed in his mouth, and discovered that during the remissions he could swallow pretty well—could make one or two motions of deglutition and swallow as much as a teaspoonful during each remission. Soon after the laudanum was disposed of the ipecac mixture arrived. This, mixed with two or three ounces of water and administered in the same quiet way, did not pass the fauces quite so smoothly, and before it was half disposed of the tannin mixture arrived. Of this he swallowed, without difficulty, a teaspoonful containing about three grains. After allowing a few moments respite, the remainder of the

ipecac mixture was administered and followed by another dose of tannin. Twenty minutes had now elapsed since my arrival on the scene, and probably half an hour since the miserable man had been obliged to scream in his agony.

12.20 A. M.—At this time it was evident that the involuntary muscles were not as yet dangerously involved. The pulse, which had not previously been noticed, was accelerated to about 100, and was otherwise regular, even during the paroxysms. Deglutition was possible during the remissions, though very difficult. The muscles of the larynx acted with all their usual precision during deglutition.

It was soon noticed that warm perspiration was breaking out on the forehead and extending over the body. The remissions were longer—the paroxysms not so violent. The muscles of the chest and neck were not so much affected. The head was lifted from its hollow and a pillow placed under it. The chamber vessel was observed to contain about a pint of coffee-coloured fluid, mixed with a more solid brown material—the whole supposed from its odour to have been vomited, and to contain most of the strychnia. This circumstance, with the evident improvement of the symptoms, changed a vague hope into a confident expectation of his recovery. A portion of his history was learned, his name, the names and address of his family, &c. He had purchased the strychnia at Toledo, supped at Ashtabula—drinking coffee and pocketing bread, the remains of which were found in the room. He is twenty-two years of age.

He continued to take a dose of tannin about once every twenty minutes while the convulsions lasted. A cup of tea was taken by the teaspoonful. This was accomplished the more readily, as he complained much of thirst and burning in the throat; probably partly due to the sulphate of zinc which he had taken.

1 A. M.—Symptoms are all better; no vomiting as yet. Took ipecac ʒjss. Vomiting in about half an hour; evacuated nearly half pint of straw-coloured fluid.

2 A. M.—Continued to improve. Hamstring muscles rigid. Muscles generally relaxed, except an occasional shudder.

3 A. M.—Continuing to improve, he was left in charge of the night watchman.

10 A. M.—With some persuasion and assistance got up and sat on the side of the bed. He was unable to hold a spoon in his hand, but drank from a cup nearly half a pint of boiled milk, thickened a little with farina, and he approved of its flavour. His hands were partially paralyzed, so that he was not able to hold anything between the thumb and fingers. But he held the cup awkwardly between the two hands, as a bear might do. He complained of great muscular soreness, principally of the muscles along the spine.

2½ P. M.—About fifteen hours after swallowing the poison, his brothers having arrived to take him home, he got up and stood alone, and with some little assistance dressed and walked down the stairs of three stories to the omnibus which was to carry him to the railroad station. His home is about thirty miles distant on the line of the railroad.

The chief point of interest in this case seems to be the rapid and steady recovery after the ingestion of the large quantity of strychnia supposed—forty grains. Was it due to coffee taken at supper in the evening? Time enough had elapsed for most of the coffee to be absorbed from the sto-

mach. Was it due to the manner in which the poison was taken? It probably was swallowed rolled up between morsels of bread, so as to give the least possible offence to the palate. We may fairly attribute the recovery in some degree to this circumstance; for if the vomiting occurred promptly it must have evacuated most of the poison before it was dissolved or detached from the bread. We do not know how much of the result to attribute to each of the remedial measures employed. They were administered pretty much altogether, and the improvement was observed, and was steadily progressive almost from the first moment.

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ART. IX.—*Report of a Trial for Malpractice in the Court of Common Pleas of Perry County, Pennsylvania.* By ISAAC LEFEVER, M.D., one of the Associate Judges of the Court.

Mary Jane Colyer, who is a minor, and sues by her next friend and father Nathan Colyer, <i>vs.</i> Drs. Philip Ebbert and Patrick M'Morris.	}	No. 28, August T., 1863. Summons in Trespass in the case. Defendants plead Not Guilty.
Attorneys for Plaintiff— B. F. Junkin, Esq., W. A. Sponsler, Esq., of New Bloomfield, Pa. For Defendants— Wm. H. Miller, Esq., of Carlisle, C. J. T. M'Intire, Esq., of New Bloomfield, Lewis W. Potter, Esq., “ “	}	Ninth Judicial District of Pa. Hon. Jas. H. Graham, President Judge.

*Sponsler for Plaintiff.*—The case in which you have just been sworn is one of vast importance. Mary J. Colyer *vs.* Drs. Ebbert and M'Morris. Cause of Complaint. Father lives in Penn Township, Dr. Ebbert also in Penn Township, and Dr. M'Morris in Buffalo. In January, 1858, Mrs. Colyer was confined—sent for Drs. Ebbert and M'Morris. Through alleged misconception of duty during labour or without cause they amputated the arm of the child. There was, what the doctors called, an arm presentation, and before the child was born they cut one arm off, thus maiming the child for life. For this conduct this suit is brought for damages. Some of our witnesses are ladies; they are disposed often to tell counsel as little as possible. We can only give facts. Dr. Ebbert was sent for in the evening—staid till 2 or 3 A.M. next morning. The arm presented; from this time until 11 or 12 o'clock he allowed the woman to lie without any effort to relieve her. Dr. M'Morris came at this time. First thing he did was to cut off the arm, and broke the bone. Child was then born by effort of nature. Physicians were of no use but to cut off arm. When you hear the evidence, you will render just such a verdict as is right in law.

Evidence for plaintiff.—Mrs. Elizabeth Keel, sworn. I knew Mrs. Colyer, wife of Nathan Colyer, in her lifetime. I was present when she was sick. Remained until morning, went home about daylight, and was at home about